

CHAPTER LXXII

Babbalanja Starts To His Feet

For twenty-four hours, seated stiff, and motionless, Babbalanja spoke not a word; then, almost without moving a muscle, muttered thus:--"At banquets surfeit not, but fill; partake, and retire; and eat not again till you crave. Thereby you give nature time to work her magic transformings; turning all solids to meat, and wine into blood. After a banquet you incline to repose:--do so: digestion commands. All this follow those, who feast at the tables of Wisdom; and all such are they, who partake of the fare of old Bardianna."

"Art resuscitated, then, Babbalanja?" said Media. "Ay, my lord, I am just risen from the dead."

"And did Azzageddi conduct you to their realms?"

"Fangs off! fangs off! depart, thou fiend!--unhand me! or by Oro, I will die and spite thee!"

"Quick, quick, Mohi! let us change places," cried Yoomy.

"How now, Babbalanja?" said Media.

"Oh my lord man--not you my lord Media!--high and mighty Puissance!

great King of Creation!--thou art but the biggest of braggarts! In every age, thou boastest of thy valorous advances!--flat fools, old dotards, and numskulls, our sires! All the Past, wasted time! the Present knows all! right lucky, fellow-beings, we live now! every man an author! books plenty as men! strike a light in a minute! teeth sold by the pound! all the elements fetching and carrying! lightning running on errands! rivers made to order! the ocean a puddle!--

But ages back they boasted like us; and ages to come, forever and ever, they'll boast. Ages back they black-balled the past, thought the last day was come; so wise they were grown. Mardi could not stand long; have to annex one of the planets; invade the great sun; colonize the moon;--conquerors sighed for new Mardis; and sages for heaven--having by heart all the primers here below. Like us, ages back they groaned under their books; made bonfires of libraries, leaving ashes behind, mid which we reverentially grope for charred pages, forgetting we are so much wiser than they.--But amazing times! astounding revelations; preternatural divulgings!--How now?--more wonderful than all our discoveries is this: that they never were discovered before. So simple, no doubt our ancestors overlooked them; intent on deeper things--the deep things of the soul. All we discover has been with us since the sun began to roll; and much we discover, is not worth the discovering. We are children, climbing trees after birds' nests, and making a great shout, whether we find eggs in them or no. But where are our wings, which our fore-fathers surely had not? Tell us, ye sages! something worth an archangel's learning; discover, ye discoverers, something new. Fools, fools! Mardi's not changed: the sun

yet rises in its old place in the East; all things go on in the same old way; we cut our eye-teeth just as late as they did, three thousand years ago."

"Your pardon," said Mohi, "for beshrew me, they are not yet all cut. At threescore and ten, here have I a new tooth coming now."

"Old man! it but clears the way for another. The teeth sown by the alphabet-founder, were eye-teeth, not yet all sprung from the soil. Like spring-wheat, blade by blade, they break ground late; like spring-wheat, many seeds have perished in the hard winter glebe. Oh, my lord! though we galvanize corpses into St. Vitus' dances, we raise not the dead from their graves! Though we have discovered the circulation of the blood, men die as of yore; oxen graze, sheep bleat, babies bawl, asses bray--loud and lusty as the day before the flood. Men fight and make up; repent and go at it; feast and starve; laugh and weep; pray and curse; cheat, chaffer, trick, truckle, cozen, defraud, fib, lie, beg, borrow, steal, hang, drown--as in the laughing and weeping, tricking and truckling, hanging and drowning times that have been. Nothing changes, though much be new-fashioned: new fashions but revivals of things previous. In the books of the past we learn naught but of the present; in those of the present, the past. All Mardi's history--beginning middle, and finis--was written out in capitals in the first page penned. The whole story is told in a title-page. An exclamation point is entire Mardi's autobiography."

"Who speaks now?" said Media, Bardianna, Azzageddi, or Babbalanja?"

"All three: is it not a pleasant concert?"

"Very fine: very fine.--Go on; and tell us something of the future."

"I have never departed this life yet, my lord."

"But just now you said you were risen from the dead." "From the buried dead within me; not from myself, my lord."

"If you, then, know nothing of the future--did Bardianna?"

"If he did, naught did he reveal. I have ever observed, my lord, that even in their deepest lucubrations, the profoundest, frankest, ponderers always reserve a vast deal of precious thought for their own private behoof. They think, perhaps, that 'tis too good, or too bad; too wise, or too foolish, for the multitude. And this unpleasant vibration is ever consequent upon striking a new vein of ideas in the soul. As with buried treasures, the ground over them sounds strange and hollow. At any rate, the profoundest ponderer seldom tells us all he thinks; seldom reveals to us the ultimate, and the innermost; seldom makes us open our eyes under water; seldom throws open the totus-in-toto; and never carries us with him, to the unconsubsistent, the ideaimmanens, the super-essential, and the One."

Confusion! Remember the Quadammodatatives!"

"Ah!" said Braid-Beard, "that's the crack in his calabash, which all the Dicides of Doxdox will not mend."

"And from that crazy calabash he gives us to drink, old Mohi."

"But never heed his leaky gourd nor its contents, my lord. Let these philosophers muddle themselves as they will, we wise ones refuse to partake."

"And fools like me drink till they reel," said Babbalanja. "But in these matters one's calabash must needs go round to keep afloat. Fogle-orum!"